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ABSTRACT

This paper applies the Eulau and Karps framework for explaining the responsiveness of legislative bodies to public school boards. Eulau and Karps argue that responsiveness deals with a complex, multidimensional set of transactional relationships that can be analytically divided into four components. A high level of responsiveness in one component can go together with unresponsiveness in another. Prototype empirical indexes for the components of responsiveness are presented to investigate both the general level of school board responsiveness and the relationships between components of responsiveness. Since school boards are fundamentally different from other governmental legislative bodies, a brief consideration of their role in school governance provides background and context for the indexes of responsiveness. To the four components of responsiveness outlined by Eulau and Karps--policy, service, public goods, and symbolic responsiveness--is added a fifth, responsiveness as public influence on legislators' attitudes and behavior. Four foci are used in examining these components--the content of communication, the source of communication, the source of response, and the content of response. Individual boards are inconsistently responsive across components, components are independent of each other, and operational measures within components are independent of each other. (Author/IRT)

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RESPONSIVENESS IN LOCAL POLITICS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL BOARDS*

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RESPONSIVENESS IN LOCAL POLITICS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL BOARDS

Generally speaking, most Americans believe that government "should do what the people want," should be responsive. Virtually no one argues that government should not be responsive. As Eulau and Prewitt put it: "...in a democracy, the degree to which the governors are responsive to the preferences of the governed is the sine qua non of whether democracy in fact exists."[1] Similarly, Verba and Nie argue that "responsiveness is what democracy is supposed to be about...."[2] Thus, at all levels of American government, a popularly elected legislative body participates in the policy-making process. The battle cry of the American Revolutionary War, "No taxation without representation," is manifested to this day in Congress, state legislatures, city councils and school boards.

There is agreement that legislative bodies are the institutional key to responsive government and that responsiveness is the key to democracy. However, there is no clear agreement about how one decides whether or not a legislative body is in fact responsive. The general confusion surrounding the theoretical and empirical status of the concept of responsiveness has been ably documented by Eulau and Karps.[3] They argue that responsiveness defined most broadly deals with a complex, multidimensional set of transactional relationships which can be analytically divided into four components. Furthermore, they hold that there is no intrinsic reason why a high level of responsiveness in one component cannot go together with unresponsiveness in another. The Eulau and Karps essay concludes with a call for further studies of responsiveness to take account of its compositional nature.

This paper attempts to apply the Eulau and Karps' framework to the responsiveness of public school boards. Prototype empirical indices for the components of responsiveness will be presented to investigate both the general level of school board responsiveness and the relationships between components of responsiveness for school boards. Since school boards are fundamentally different from other legislative bodies in national, state and local government, a brief consideration of their role in school governance will provide a useful background and give context to the indices of responsiveness.

School Boards: Reluctant Legislatures

The notion of a system of public schooling, responsive to the citizenry and controlled by a democratically selected governing board, is thoroughly pervasive in America.[4] In a limited sense, the school board is a local equivalent to Congress or the state legislature. As in other legislative bodies, most school board members are selected by popular vote. Over 90 percent of school board members are chosen by election, the balance are appointed by either elected government officials or commissions named by elected officials. School boards maintain the power of the purse through the legal requirement that they issue appropriations decisions prior to the expenditure of monies. Furthermore, approximately 88 percent of school boards have independent authority to levy taxes. School boards are general deliberative and decision-making bodies which provide a public forum for the articulation of policy preferences and the resolution of policy issues. Finally, as are their legislative counterparts at other levels of government, school boards are given the nominal authority of establishing district-

wide policy and overseeing the implementation of that policy by administrative employees of the school district.

In many ways, then, school boards are "little legislatures" and are subject to evaluation according to a variety of criteria of responsiveness. This is no minor point. In most countries, school governance is structurally designed to avoid responsiveness. There are no local, elected, boards of education. Hence, the creation of a decentralized, electorally accountable institution of government can be taken as a conscious attempt to maximize "lay control."

Are school boards, then, appropriately compared to other legislative bodies? Many educationists would argue that they are not. The conventional wisdom of educational administration dictates a concern with "expertise, professionalization, non-political control, and efficiency."[5] To support this argument, administrators call our attention to the fact that, unlike other governmental levels with elected governing bodies, schools supply a service to a limited clientele rather than to the public at large. The clients of schools are its students (e.g., those who directly receive its service). Of course, a literate population benefits the community by providing it with manpower. Consequently, "good schools are a community's best investment," and other such slogans abound when budget and bond elections occur. Nevertheless, schools are regarded by those who govern them as primarily responsible for providing a professional service (much like a hospital) to clients (a subset of the general population), who are not necessarily the best judges of their own welfare.[6] Thus, the primary beneficiary of schools is not the public at large. Textbooks in educational administration (especially those written prior to the "community control"

movement of the 1960's) frequently lamented that a parent, who would never challenge the expertise of a doctor, thinks nothing of arguing with a superintendent. While superintendents were compared with physicians, they were rarely compared to other executives legally responsible to an elected board.

Accordingly, superintendents tend not to view school boards as legislatures, but rather as advisory committees whose formal imprimatur is legally required before schools can be governed. It is revealing to examine the remarks of superintendents to their colleagues concerning board-superintendent relations. A good focus for such an examination is superintendents' responses to the idea that school boards be provided with independent staffs, such as those available to congressional and state legislative committees. Their nearly unanimous opposition to this idea is based upon a rather straightforward notion: boards must trust superintendents or replace them. Hence, the desire for independent staff assistance is interpreted as lack of confidence. Surely other chief executives would have different interpretations. Indeed, the "trust me or fire me" argument, not limited to the issue of independent staffs for boards, tells us much about the norms of school governance. Superintendents expect to be unanimously supported by their boards in virtually every vote by the board in which an executive recommendation is made. A modest (say 5 or 6 percent) deviation from this pattern is taken as evidence of loss of confidence.

The idea of "unity" or board consensus is not without political motivation, however. "Unity is a prerequisite to a reputation for expertise and thus it adds to the bargaining power of schoolmen."[7] Unity becomes quite important because of the "schizophrenic" nature of the structure of school governance. Although viewed by professional educators as a service

organization, school districts are generally required to conduct legislative business in open, public meetings. Most formal decisions are publicly made. Unlike Congress or state legislatures, executive sessions are usually limited to personnel matters (including collective bargaining). Of course, one can argue that public sessions of school boards are no more than a formality. Whether or not this is true, the school board meeting is the forum of making a decision. Thus, a sharp contrast can again be drawn between school boards and state or national legislative bodies where decisions are rarely made on the floor.

Additionally, such legislative sessions normally include the opportunity for public participation. Many school boards include as a routine agenda item comments or proposals from the public. Public access is further enhanced by the small size of school boards. As they average about seven members, there is little utilization of the committee system. All board members publicly participate in all decisions. Some districts do have budget committees, but these are not comparable to "normal" legislative committees (they are made up of a blue-ribbon panel of citizens, board members and administrators, and are advisory ornamentations).

Not only is there little division of labor among board members (and little need to delegate responsibility to committees), there is also no overwhelming local educational bureaucracy to immerse citizens and board members in jungles of red tape. Although large city school systems employ huge central office staffs, the majority of the nation's 16,000 school districts are really quite small. The average central office staff is less than three persons, including the superintendent.[8]

Such a "town meeting" atmosphere obviates the need for much of the

communications process normally assumed by interest groups. Although interest groups are occasionally active during periods of episodic crisis, they are not normally part of the political process. Indeed, the most conspicuous interest group is the ubiquitous PTA, generally conceded to be little more than a cheerleader for the administration. Teachers' organizations are becoming more active, but their representative function does not extend to the public. Taxpayers' associations, whose protestations attract substantial media coverage are, in fact, rare.

Interest groups are not active for a variety of reasons, but surely one reason is that the need for a "middle man" is not very important in school governance. If one wants to be heard, all that is necessary is that one go to the meeting and raise one's hand. "Access," the "basic objective" of groups, according to Truman, is within the grasp of everyone.[9]

Not only do citizens not need interest groups for access, the board does not need them to determine the "active consensus." Constituents and board members have direct access to each other, if they wish to utilize such access. Indeed, the only interest group which seeks private access is the professional association representing teachers, and this quest has led directly to collective bargaining, which deliberately excludes public participation.

The efforts of teachers' associations to circumvent public decisions are symptomatic of the professionals' fear of public participation. Such a fear can be seen in the institutionalization of devices designed to counterbalance the potential of widespread public participation created by the simplicity and openness of school board meetings.

As a consequence of the reform movement of the early twentiety century,

school boards retained the trappings of public forums while abandoning many of the linkage mechanisms which enhance sustained public participation. Since many responsibilities formerly exercised by boards were delegated to superintendents, boards reduced the number of meetings held. Unlike Congress or state legislatures, tney do not meet in continuous or semi-continuous sessions. Typically, they hold two meetings per month. Occasionally, meetings go on into the morning, but the average meeting is not longer than four hours. Thus, while access is easy, opportunities are limited to these relatively brief public meetings. There are few opportunities for continuous negotiations, bargaining, and compromise. Active citizens can, of course, contact board members in private. Still, opportunities for communication between active citizens and a collective, decision-making unit are less apparent in school governance than in state legislative or congressional governance.

Further, the school board member, as the recipient of a public or private communication, may not attach as much significance to "constituent" opinion as would a state or national legislator. The mental image of a constituent is somewhat vague. Most school board members are elected in non-partisan, at-large elections which are free of meaningful issue content.[10] They seek office, or in many cases are recruited for office, because of a sense of civic responsibility. Rarely do school board members view their positions as one from which to advance politically. As amateurs, unpaid, meeting infrequently, and serving because of an upper-class belief in noblesse oblige, they may very well view constituent communications as "illegitimate," or as "pressure."[11]

Even if school board members were not suspicious of constituents, the

amateur status of boards makes it difficult for them to respond. Few school boards have staffs or even secretarial assistance. If a constituent makes a request for information, the most a board member can do is refer him/her to the superintendent's office. If the constituent makes a policy demand, the board member may be reluctant to respond individually for fear of breaking the code calling for unity. Hence, the rational response is to transfer the demand to the superintendent.

The superintendent occupies a position unlike that of any other chief executive. He/she is not (with the exception of a few districts) elected, but serves at the pleasure of the board. Hence, the superintendent has no veto power over board decisions. The closest approximation to the superintendent is the city manager in the council-manager form of government. The similarities are apparent. City councils appoint city managers to administer public services, leaving to the council the responsibility of developing public policy. In practice, of course, such councils expect the manager to provide substantial policy input.

Yet there are substantial differences. Virtually all school districts have supeirntendents; only 43 percent of all municipal governments operate under the council-manager plan. Obviously, then, local governments find it possible to function without the expertise provided by managers while school systems do not. Political scientists have debated the desirability of city managers; educationists never question the necessity of superintendents (indeed, they are more likely to propose the abolition of school boards).

Superintendents, then, although they share many traits with city managers, expect more deference from their legislative bodies.[12] Many reasons for such deference also, of course, apply to city managers. In both cases, legislators

are usually elected in non-partisan, at-large elections. And in both cases, there is no single political counterfoil to the administration.

However, in school governance, superintendents have achieved more influence because of the prevailing ideology of board members. Board members accept the notion that education and politics do not mix, and therefore deny the legitimacy of intra-district conflict. Unlike city councils, they have a clearer image of their government as one of providing a professional service to a limited clientele. Hence, they defer to administrative expertise. Such expertise is easier to demonstrate for two reasons. First, superintendents generally are formally trained and hold advanced degrees. The education of city managers, by contrast, is quite diverse. Ninety-six percent of all superintendents hold advanced degrees, compared to 27 percent of all city managers. Virtually all such advanced degrees are held in educational administration. City managers, by contrast, tend to be administrative generalists. City managers, most of whom do not hold advanced degrees, are public administration majors. Superintendents can point to advanced work in curriculum supervision, school finance, school law, etc. Thus, superintendents look like experts.

Furthermore, superintendents talk like experts and there is no objective way a board member can measure the reliability of what is being said. The city manager's claim to expertise can more easily be tested. His goals are normally focused. But who is to say if the schools are achieving their goals, or even what these goals are, or should be?

Under such circumstances, the board easily falls into the role of representing the administration to the public, rather than representing the public to the administration. Unlike state or national legislatures, they are content to allow their agenda to be set for them by the administration.

The administration, in controlling the agenda (thus defining legitimate areas of consultation with the board), can structure a meeting so as to guarantee consistent, unanimous support.

Further, in the absence of an independent staff, the board cannot oversee the execution of its policy mandates. Thus, they are left in the unenviable position of approving an agenda set by the administration and evaluating implementation on the basis of information supplied by the administration. Not only is the superintendent the dominant policy maker, there is the additional problem of constraints imposed by state, and especially federal governments; and the growing influence of collective bargaining, all of which diminish the role of the board in school governance.

Such constraints hamper the superintendent more than the board, but both are affected. Pierce, for example, argues that "it was not until teachers began to organize and use collective bargaining to gain more control over educational policy that the monopoly of school administration began to crumble."[13] Thus, 75 percent of collective bargaining agreements contain references to curriculum (e.g., course content, curriculum change procedures).[14] Such agreements are nevertheless regarded as personnel negotiations and are conducted privately. Hence, a response to a demand to a school board to modify, or even to evaluate the curriculum may be impossible.

Equally impossible are responses to demands to modify or abandon policies imposed as conditions for federal grants from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The basic thrust of such grants is equality of educational opportunity; districts must comply with HEW guidelines or abandon the grant. Desegregation plans in compliance with federal civil

rights legislation are also subject to HEW approval. School boards have no latitude in such matters. Their only recourse is litigation, a course which invites a further reduction of school board authority. Thus, as a consequence of a racial imbalance case in Denver, the school board was directed to create new administrative positions.[15] The board was directed to adopt and implement a policy. Public input is without value under such circumstances. Although most federal intervention includes some gesture towards local control, the consequence of such intervention is clearly the further reduction of the ability of the board to respond to constituent demands. The litigation over busing is merely the most spectacular example of the growing reliance upon non-local units to impose a national will upon local districts. Similarly, the continued challenge to local property taxes as sources of school finance will, if successful, reduce the ability of local boards to set spending priorities.

Schools are alleged to be the key to success in American economic life. They monopolize the process whereby one obtains the credentials to earn a decent living. Therefore, they have been the target of more federal intervention than other local governments and are consequently more constrained.

There are, then, opportunities for school boards to be more responsive than other legislatures, and there are barriers to responsiveness that are unique to school districts. An overview of the realities of school governance suggests that the barriers exceed the opportunities.

Our various inquiries into school governance lead us to conclude that school boards are an inefficient target of efforts by citizens to influence educational policy.[16] Of all items considered by a typical board during an academic year, three-fourths are discussed at the initiative of the central

administrative staff or superintendent. Thus, the administration is in a gate-keeping position, a position which is used to establish an agenda which will minimize controlling and maximize routine decision-making. There are limits, of course. A district in the midst of an explosive controversy will, ultimately, force the board to deal with the problem. Generally, however, problems are brought to the board by the superintendent and his staff. The role of the board is to respond to the administration rather than to the public. The public enters the game only after the issues have been defined. Not only is the agenda beyond the control of elected representatives, but they are also provided policy recommendations to accompany agenda items. In 66 percent of recorded votes, the position of the administration was made known to the board.

There are several ways such recommendations are made known. In many cases, the board is presented with an agenda and the administrative recommendations at the beginning of the meeting. Sometimes the administration provides a series of alternative policies, indicating its preference. More often, a single, administratively supported alternative is offered the board. In neither case does the board have the resources or the option of developing its own policy. Consequently, in 96 percent of the recorded votes, the superintendent's position is ratified by the board. Moreover, 90 percent of such votes are unanimous.

Public input under such circumstances is low. How low is low? Certainly not as low as public participation in state legislatures or Congress, but not as high as one might expect given the ease of access described above. During an academic year, about one in five topics introduced at school board meetings solicit public comment. Put another way, 9 percent of the statements

made at meetings are made by citizens. The remainder came from the educational establishment. As important as quantity of input is quality of input: what is said. If school boards are to respond, there must be a demand--something which requires a response. Political scientists, incorporating the notions of systems theory, speak of "demand articulation" as the beginning of the governing cycle. However, school governance lacks this key ingredient. Sixty one percent of public comments involved not the making of demands but the requesting and supplying of information. Of the statements classified as demands, 26 percent were in support of the policy proposed by the superintendent to the board and 13 percent were opposed. Private communication between boards and publics is equally sparse. Although private contacts are somewhat more policy laden (about half contain reference to policy alternatives), the average school board member received such communication less than five times per week.

These data suggest that school board meetings do not serve as a forum for debate and deliberation, but rather as an opportunity for the administration to legitimate its decisions and to reveal them to the public. They resemble presidential press conferences more than legislative decision-making arenas.

MEASURING SCHOOL BOARD RESPONSIVENESS

In their review of literature on responsiveness of legislatures, Eulau and Karps point out that most empirical studies have employed a congruence or concurrence notion of responsiveness. Their call for broader theoretical and operational definitions of responsiveness follows from the flaws of research to date. The first flaw is that the ongoing emphasis on

concurrence overlooks the consistent finding at all levels of government that citizens are not significant sources of policy demands. This point is of particular relevance to school governance, where public input is meager at best. The typical voter turnout in school board, budget and bond elections is on the order of twenty percent. And, as we have seen, citizens do not take great advantage of the opportunity to participate in school board meetings and to contact board members in private. The lack of public-school board communication makes concurrence unacceptable as a single basis for measurement of responsiveness.

A second flaw of past research on responsiveness is inattention to the asymmetry of the representational relationship. The assumption that the typical flow of public policy formation is from public to legislators to administrators is unrealistic for all governments. Research in educational governance suggests the flow of communications is the exact opposite. Administrators dominate the agenda setting and proposal development functions. School boards rarely choose between alternative policies, they endorse the "suggestion" of the superintendent, thus legitimizing and communicating executive decisions to the public. While concurrence is one of several viable components of responsiveness, there should be no confusion that concurrence between constituents and school board implies a causal direction from the former to the latter.

A third flaw of past research is confusion about the proper unit of analysis. Responsiveness is an attribute of a legislature as a collective body, not an attribute of an individual legislator. As Eulau noted elsewhere, it is important to distinguish between the subject of inquiry and the object of inquiry.[17] Inference concerning the objective unit (the

collectivity) proceeds, of necessity, from the observation of the subjective unit (the individual). However, conclusions about the entire legislature must not be based on the behavior of isolated legislators. One's methodology should provide for aggregation of individual data into indicators for the legislative body as a whole.

Eulau and Karps call for future empirical research on responsiveness to recognize that responsiveness is a systemic property of legislative bodies, that measures of concurrence do not indicate causal direction, and that concurrence alone is an insufficient indicator of responsiveness. They argue that there are four components of responsiveness which, as a whole, constitute representation. While each component can be viewed as an independent target of responsiveness, the complexity of the representational nexus requires that all four be considered in concert. The balance of this paper attempts to operationalize indicators of each target of responsiveness for boards in eleven school districts to investigate the responsiveness of those school boards and the interrelation of components of responsiveness.

Data Sources

During the nine month 1974-75 academic year we collected data on the flow of communications and decisions in eleven public school districts in the United States and Canada. Our data set consists of three major elements:

(1) Objective records of all statements and decisions made at central school board meetings, meetings of the superintnedent and his administrative cabinet, and other formally constituted media of communication exchange (e.g., regional board meetings, public hearings, etc.),

were recorded by two trained observers in each school district.*

(2) School board members, superintendents, and other senior administrators were interviewed regularly to record their perceptions of presentations made by members of the public at meetings and private communications about school policy from members of the public. Those who made presentations at public meetings were interviewed concerning their perceptions of how they had been received by school district officials at the meeting and of any other previous contacts.

(3) An opinion survey on school policy was conducted among samples of the mass public, interest group leaders, and among the school board and senior administrators in each school district.

Thus, the sample of districts is small, but the amount of information is immense. We have information on unarticulated preferences of the mass public, private and public communications between school district officials and their constituents, and policy decisions made at school board and administrative cabinet meetings. We have both objective and perceptual data relevant to the query "who says what to whom with what effect?"

Our first departure from past research on educational decision-making was to collect data on both events and perceptions over a long period of time. Our second departure was to make the communication the central focus of our study. Social scientists typically concentrate on the behavior modification component of policy-making. Given this interest, the decision or

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* All data collection was constrained by precise rules. Observers were trained in the use of various protocols to be used in the recording of observation and interview data. These instruments ensured that information collected and recorded was consistent across districts.

choice quite naturally becomes the unit of analysis. Unfortunately, this approach neglects the fact that much public business is dispatched without any attempt at closure: frequently "the decision" simply does not exist. It is entirely possible that a substantial proportion of the demands placed upon school districts can be satisfied without the modification of behavior or policies or a decision (for example, demands may require no more than the dissemination of readily available information). We believe that to focus exclusively on major decisions can be misleading because it ignores the overwhelming majority of routine public business.

Thus, we attempted as complete a description as possible of the pattern of communications in public school districts. We define communications as a set of premises transmitted from one unit to another. Our foci are: (1) the content of communication, (2) the source of communication, (3) the source of response, and (4) the content of response.

Policy Responsiveness

The first component of responsiveness focuses on how the representative and the represented interact with respect to the making of public policy. The premise underlying this concept of responsiveness is a meaningful connection between constituent policy preferences or demands and the representative's policy conduct.

> This is what Miller and Stokes called "congruence" and what Verba and Nie called "concurrence." Whatever the terms, the operational definition is the same: if the representative and his constituency agree on a particular policy, no matter how the agreement has come about, then the representative is responsive.[18]

Our first index of policy responsiveness links constituent attitude

and school board behavior. Constituent preference is operationalized in terms of answers to the survey question: At the present time, what do you consider the most important problems facing the public schools in your community that school officials try to take care of? School board behavior is operationalized in terms of topics of discussions at school board meetings during the academic year. Concurrence scores were calculated for each constituent survey respondent and then aggregated by district employing the methodology described by Verba and Nie.[19] Our agenda concurrence scores are summarized in Table A.

The mean score of 69 and the range from scores of 48 to 86 suggest that school board agendas are quite responsive to the desires of constituents. The levels of agreement are more impressive when one considers the restrictiveness of the concurrence index and the nature of concerns expressed by the public. A significant minority of "most significant problems" were either matters school boards generally do not see as their responsibility (such as teaching the moral precepts of specific religions) or matters outside the legal jurisdiction of school boards (such as changing the statewide financial program of school support). In short, agenda concurrence scores are depressed due to erroneous concepts held by constituents concerning the powers of school boards.[20]

A second concurrence indicator, also presented in Table A focuses on linkage between constituent behavior and school board behavior. Constituent behavior is operationalized as demands made at school board meetings, that is, statements in support of or opposition to specific policy proposals. School board behavior is operationalized in terms of decisions reached. The concurrence score is the proportion of decisions made which matched

TABLE A

POLICY RESPONSIVENESS

District	Agenda Concurrence (P1)	Decision Concurrence (P2)
Hartshorne Hts.	73	67
Macktown	68	75
Nelsonville	60	0
Coldren Corners	59	67
Drummond Falls	78	27
Stumont	48	47
Leeville	77	55
Barwig Park	64	*
Ballard City	79	55
Grahamdale	68	86
Kentington	86	*
Mean	69.0	53.2
Standard Deviation	11.0	26.2

* Insufficient Data

the plurality preference position of constituent statements. The mean concurrence score of this index is much lower--53.2--and the dispersion of district scores is greater than the index of agenda concurrence. While most school boards satisfy a plurality of constituents who speak at meetings most of the time, for three districts a majority of decisions oppose expressed public preferences. One district never decides in accordance with expressed public preferences. Deference to citizen preferences is clearly not a norm of decision-making applied by all school districts.

Two of the special characteristics of school governance make a second type of concurrence index desirable. First, because about 70 percent of school board members are elected at large and therefore represent the same constituency, the usual concurrence expectation is that each board member will take the same position, the plurality position of constituents. This tendency is reinforced by a second factor peculiar to educational governance, the belief that the decisions should display and promote school district unity. As we have seen, approximately 90 percent of school board votes are indeed unanimous. The obvious problem of unanimity is that minority preferences go unrepresented. A school board whose constituents are narrowly divided over a range of policy areas yet consistently makes decisions unanimously is in some sense unresponsive--even though all decisions may be in accordance with the preference of a majority of constituents. A larger concept of responsiveness considers minority representation as well as majority representation.

We therefore present a distributional index of policy responsiveness in Table B. The focus is on linkage between the behavior of the public and the school board at school board meetings. The index is the proportion of time school board voting matches constituent comments. Matching occurs when

TABLE B

DISTRIBUTIONAL POLICY RESPONSIVENESS

District	School Board Meeting Voting Decisions (P3)
Hartshorne Hts.	30
Macktown	14
Nelsonville	0
Coldren Corners	44
Drummond Falls	60
Stumont	24
Leeville	33
Barwig Park	*
Ballard City	0
Grahamdale	3
Kentington	*
Mean	23.1
Standard Deviation	20.9

*Insufficient Data

(1) all public comments are in support of the policy under discussion and the school board vote is unanimously in favor, (2) all public comments are in opposition to the policy under discussion and the school board vote is unanimously to reject, or (3) public comments are divided and the school board vote is not unanimous.

The lower concurrence scores of this distributional index of school board decision-making is, of course, a consequence of unanimous school board voting despite divided public opinion. The reduction is dramatic. The mean for all districts falls to 23.1, and only one district achieves a score higher than 50. While school board decisions may generally match the preferences of their constituents, school board acknowledgement of minority preferences is shockingly low. In the larger, distributional sense, school boards are clearly not responsive in their decision-making behavior.

Service Responsiveness

Service responsiveness is the second component of the Eulau-Karps framework. This target for responsiveness:

> ...concerns the non-legislative services that a representative actually performs for individuals or groups in his district. Service responsiveness, then, refers to the advantages and benefits which the representative is able to obtain for particular constituents.[21]

This aspect of responsiveness is clearly more pertinent to state legislatures and Congress, whose constituents often ask legislators to intervene for them with large and distant bureaucracies. Since school districts are small and local units of government, constituents can speak directly with school district administrative officials. The average citizen

can communicate with his local superintendent of schools by telephone!

Although constituent service is a relatively unimportant part of the school board member's legislative role, nevertheless, a viable index of service responsiveness can be constructed. School district residents do contact board members to ask favors. Our measures of service responsiveness focus on the disposition of requests for action made by the public in private communications with school board members.

The first service index, presented in Table C, is the proportion of requests in which school board members comply with the request for action. The mean score is 30.8 with wide dispersion around the mean. The second service index, also presented in Table C, is the proportion of requests for action which are not refused by school board members. The mean score of 96.1 and the narrow range of scores indicates that school boards are almost perfectly responsive in the sense that they don't refuse service requests. Between the 30 percent whose requests are satisfied and the 4 percent whose requests are refused are the majority of requests which are referred elsewhere, still pending, or otherwise left unresolved.

These two indices reflect the fact that school board members are usually an inappropriate target for private service requests. School board members cannot reinstate a suspended student, clean up a local school playground, or make the city install a traffic signal at a hazardous intersection. They can, however, refer such requests to appropriate administrators within and without the school district. School board members lack subcommittee posts which give them special policy-making influence with the board or with certain department heads. An individual board member must have the consent of a majority of the school board (and, in most

TABLE C

SERVICE RESPONSIVENESS

ACTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH REQUEST OF
PRIVATE CONTACTOR

District	Action Taken As Requested (SR1)	Action Not Refused (SR2)
Hartshorne Hts.	48	93
Macktown	58	99
Nelsonville	29	99
Coldren Corners	4	99
Drummond Falls	11	92
Stumont	22	90
Leeville	61	95
Barwig Park	31	97
Ballard City	*	*
Grahamdale	17	99
Kentington	27	98
Mean	30.8	96.1
Standard Deviation	19.3	3.4

* Insufficient Data

cases, consent of the administration) to grant a policy action. Thus, school board members get low active ratings and high passive ratings for service responsiveness, partly as a function of their limited powers to grant service requests.

Public Goods Responsiveness

The third component of the Eulau-Karps framework is public goods responsiveness, which refers to the representative's efforts to obtain benefits for his constituency as a whole. They note that securing public goods often involves "pork barrel politics" and practices such as log-rolling, back-scratching, vote-trading, and so on. The target of responsiveness is for the representative to secure for his constituency those public goods benefits which will not be shared throughout the entire polity.

> In this conception a representative tries to get a new highway for his district or an army base or a public park because he feels that these public goods will benefit the constituency as a whole. In this perspective, the representative is eminently responsive in anticipating the needs of his district.[22]

Unfortunately, this component of responsiveness is only relevant to legislative bodies whose members represent distinct districts. Public goods responsiveness is not applicable to the 70 percent of school boards whose members are elected at large. Moreover, the prevailing ideology of school governance holds that all policy benefits are shared throughout the school district. While a congressman or state legislator would point with pride to benefits he secured for his district, a school board member would vigorously deny that he serves interests other than those of "all the children." The behavior relevant to public goods responsiveness undoubtedly exists in those districts which do not elect school boards at large. But that

behavior makes up a minor (and covert) share of the business of a minor share of all school districts. The public goods component of responsiveness is of limited utility for school governance and will not be pursued here.

Symbolic Responsiveness

The fourth component in the Eulau-Karps framework is symbolic responsiveness. Symbolic responsiveness focuses on the behavior of legislators and the perceptions of constituents. Legislators engage in symbolic responsiveness when they manipulate political symbols in order to generate and maintain support. Eulau and Karps note that:

> The need for giving symbolic reassurance is being demonstrated by the "reach out" efforts of the new President of the United States--walking down Pennsylvania Avenue after his inauguration, fire-side chats, telephonic call-a-thons, visits to stricken economic areas, being "Jimmy" Carter, and so on. The purpose of all of these symbolic acts is to project an image that the President is truly the people's representative and ready to be responsive to them.[23]

Symbolic responsiveness can also be measured in terms of constituent perceptions. For constituents,

> What matters in symbolic responsiveness is that the constituents feel represented, quite regardless of whether the representative is responsive in his policy stands or the services or public goods he provides for his constituency.[24]

Table D presents information on symbolic behavior by the eleven school boards. The focus is on the opportunities boards present to the public for participating in school board legislative sessions. School board meetings are nominally open to the public and all school boards solicit public attendance and participation in discussions. However, the opportunity for public

TABLE D

SYMBOLIC RESPONSIVENESS

District	Regular School Board Meetings Per Month	Time	Items From Constituents
Hartshorne Hts.	2	One morning, one evening	No regular agenda item
Macktown	2	One morning or afternoon, one evening	Beginning of meeting
Nelsonville	2	Evenings	Beginning of meeting
Coldren Corners	2	Evenings	End of meeting
Drummond Falls	4	Three afternoon, one evening	End of meeting
Stumont	1	Evenings	No regular agenda item
Leeville	2	Evenings	No regular agenda item
Barwig Park	2	Evenings	Beginning of meeting
Ballard City	2	Afternoons	Beginning of meeting
Grahamdale	2	Evenings	End of meeting
Kentington	1	Evenings	Beginning of meeting

attendance is in large measure a function of how frequently meetings are held, when the public can voice their concerns. The range of meeting frequency is from one to four per month, with most boards holding two meetings per month. Seven boards hold all meetings in the evenings, three hold some meetings in the afternoon, and one holds all meetings in the afternoon. It is obviously more convenient for the average person to attend evening meetings. Holding meetings in the morning or afternoon is a subtle but effective method of reducing public participation. Finally, it is possible to examine when during the meetings constituents may make comments on items not on the formal agenda. Five school boards reserve time at the beginning of each meeting to hear general comments, three make constituents wait until the formal agenda has been completed, and three have no regular arrangement for general comments. Although these indicators of symbolic responsiveness behavior by school boards are qualitative, it is clear that school boards vary widely in their levels of responsiveness.

Table E summarizes two indices of symbolic responsiveness which focus on public attitudes. The first is the proportion of survey respondents who replied that they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the performance of the school board. The mean score is 32.5 and the range is 19 to 43 percent. Clearly, constituents do not give their school boards high satisfaction ratings. However, it is important to note that these scores are in line with satisfaction ratings for the President, Congress, and other political actors.

The second index of constituent attitudinal symbolic responsiveness employs the survey question, If a group of citizens like yourself brought a problem to the attention of the school board, what do you think the school

TABLE E

SYMBOLIC RESPONSIVENESS

District	Satisfied With School Board (SB1)	Board Would Act On Problem Raised By Citizens (SB2)
Hartshorne Hts.	25	33
Macktown	43	40
Nelsonville	42	42
Coldren Corners	41	34
Drummond Falls	19	29
Stumont	28	29
Leeville	29	25
Barwig Park	41	32
Ballard City	24	23
Grahamdale	28	31
Kentington	38	54
Mean	32.5	33.8
Standard Deviation	8.6	8.8

board would probably do? Possible responses were: (1) Try to do something about the problem, (2) Listen but not do anything about the problem, (3) Refuse to listen, (4) No opinion, no response. The index is the proportion of respondents who replied that their board would try to do something about the problem. The overall results are essentially the same as those of the general satisfaction index, although there are variations on scores within each district. It seems that the public views school boards as being about as responsive as other legislative bodies, which is to say not very responsive.

Responsiveness as Influence

We suggest a fifth component of responsiveness to supplement the Eulau and Karps list, responsiveness as public influence on legislators' attitudes and behavior. The operational focus is on the extent to which constituents and representatives perceive that the latter are influenced by the former. While policy responsiveness is, in a sense, an objective measure of constituent impact, influence here is a subjective matter.

An influence concept of responsiveness is a useful complement to policy responsiveness for two reasons. First, most policy decisions are not presented as choices between "policy X or not policy X." As in all political processes, bargaining, compromises, and amendments are employed by school boards. While a citizen who voices opposition to a proposal may see his policy preference voted down by the board, he may achieve some desirable modification as a result of his participation. For example, a group of parents may fail to prevent the adoption of a sex education curriculum, but by their protest influence the board to initiate the program on a

limited trial basis. The black and white distinction between match and non-match of policy action and constituent preference made by congruence measures does not accurately reflect the grayness of the policy process.

A second reason for including an influence concept of responsiveness follows from the fact that the vast majority of decisions are recurring, routine matters that will be subject to review and revision in the near future. Thus, while a school board may fail to enact a constituent proposal today, they may be influenced to reconsider and pass the proposal later. A school board may be unable to start an extracurricular soccer program when asked to do so by students and parents due to lack of funds. Although the board refuses the requested action today, they may be influenced to make soccer a high priority item for the following fiscal year. In many cases an objective observation of constituent request and legislative action may present a picture of non-responsiveness. Yet, according to the perceptions of constituents and legislators, the legislative body was responsive to the extent that its members were influenced by constituents.

To assess the subjective influential responsiveness of school boards we (1) asked citizens who made policy requests at school board meetings whether they thought their presentation influenced board members, (2) asked school board members if they were influenced by those presentations at meetings, and (3) asked school board members if they were influenced by constituents who initiated private contacts. The resulting indices, the proportion of perceptions of influence, are presented in Tables F and G.

School board members report that they are generally not influenced by constituents who speak at board meetings. The mean influence score is 28.0,

TABLE F

PUBLIC INFLUENCE AT SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

District	School Board Members' Perspective--(I1)	Constituents' Perspective--(I2)
Hartshorne Hts.	33	70
Macktown	12	33
Nelsonville	50	*
Coldren Corners	23	56
Drummond Falls	43	42
Stumont	18	25
Leeville	49	55
Barwig Park	20	27
Ballard City	*	*
Grahamdale	16	43
Kentington	16	57
Mean	28.0	45.3
Standard Deviation	14.6	15.3

* Insufficient Data

TABLE G

PUBLIC INFLUENCE IN PRIVATE CONTACTS

District	School Board Members' Perspective (I3)
Hartshorne Hts.	55
Macktown	88
Nelsonville	78
Coldren Corners	46
Drummond Falls	63
Stumont	33
Leeville	49
Barwig Park	75
Ballard City	*
Grahamdale	33
Kentington	81
Mean	60.1
Standard Deviation	20.0

* Insufficient Data

and the high score is 50. Not surprisingly, constituents perceive a greater level of influence than do school board members. The mean constituent perception score is 43.3; for all districts but one the constituent perception score is higher than the corresponding school board perception score. These aggregate figures reflect the common situation where the person who regularly attends and speaks out at school board meetings sees himself as an active, informed, influential citizen, while the school board sees him as a malcontented chronic meeting attender.

The influence scores of private contacts in Table G are significantly higher than the influence scores of communication at meetings. The mean score is 60.1, and the scores range from 33 to 81. In every district school board perception of influence through private contact is as great or greater than influence through speaking at public meeting. In five districts board perception of influence through private contacts is higher than constituent perception of influence at board meetings. School board members are obviously not equally responsive to all requests made at all times. Constituents who want to influence their school boards would be well advised to initiate both private and public contacts.

Responsiveness in Perspective

Eulau and Karps maintain that there is no reason to expect that different components of responsiveness will be highly correlated with each other. Similarly, there is no reason to expect that school boards will exhibit the same degree of responsiveness across components. Our data strongly suggest that the components of responsiveness are indeed independent.

In Table H the districts are arrayed in rank order on the various measures of responsiveness. Nine districts show extremely inconsistent levels of responsiveness, most have ranks with range from top to bottom. Of the two consistent districts, Stumont is uniformly low and Barwig Park consistently places in the middle range. No district is consistently high. So we cannot say that any one district is consistently responsive; the single consistently unresponsive district is, in effect, a deviant case.

Nor do the intercorrelation of indices across districts produce a consistent pattern (Table I). Of 45 possible correlations only five are significant at the .05 level. (We might expect two significant correlations by chance alone). Of the five, one, the strongest, (between school board perception of influence at meetings and decision concurrence) is negative. And, of the four significant correlations, only one pairs operational measures from the same component, symbolic responsiveness. The other three significantly positive correlations are school board perception of influence in private contacts with both measures of symbolic responsiveness, and symbolic constituent rating of school board performance with non-refusal of private requests for action.

Thus, individual boards are inconsistently responsive across components, components of responsiveness are independent of each other and operational measures within components of responsiveness are independent of each other. Responsiveness is indeed a multi-faceted and bewildering concept, perhaps more so than any of us suspected.

TABLE H

RANKINGS OF DISTRICTS ON RESPONSIVENESS INDICES

District	P1	P2	P3	SR1	SR2	SB1	SB2	I1	I2	I3
Hartshorne Hts.	5	3.5	4	3	8	9	5	4	1	6
Macktown	6.5	2	6	2	2.5	1	3	1	7	1
Nelsonville	9	9	8.5	5	2.5	2	2	10	*	3
Coldren Corners	10	3.5	2	10	2.5	3.5	4	5	3	8
Drummond Falls	3	8	1	9	9	11	8.5	3	6	5
Stumont	11	7	5	7	10	7.5	8.5	7	9	9.5
Leeville	4	5.5	3	1	7	6	10	2	4	7
Barwig Park	8	*	*	4	6	3.5	6	6	8	4
Ballard City	2	5.5	8.5	*	*	10	11	*	*	*
Grahamdale	6.5	1	7	8	2.5	7.5	7	8.5	5	9.5
Kentington	1	*	*	6	5	5	1	8.5	2	2

* Insufficient data.

TABLE I

INTERCORRELATIONS OF RESPONSIVENESS INDICES

P1	--									
P2	.12	--								
P3	.12	-.06	--							
SR1	.27	.17	-.26	--						
SR2	.11	.20	-.51	.00	--					
SB1	-.31	-.03	-.30	.11	.76*	--				
SB2	.16	-.21	-.20	-.02	.52	.62*	--			
I1	.17	-.73*	.23	.15	-.23	-.31	-.30	--		
I2	.56	.18	.27	.13	.11	-.19	.20	.41	--	
I3	.38	-.37	-.13	.34	.40	.56*	.67*	.01	-.06	--
	P1	P2	P3	SR1	SR2	SB1	SB2	I1	I2	I3

* Significant at .05.

FOOTNOTES

1. Heinz Eulau and Kenneth Prewitt, Labyrinths of Democracy: Adaptations, Linkages, Representation and Policies in Urban Politics (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1973), p. 24.

2. Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 300.

3. Heinz Eulau and Paul D. Karps, "The Puzzle of Representation: Specifying Components of Responsiveness," paper prepared for delivery at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Del Webb Towne House, Phoenix, Arizona, March 31 - April 2, 1977.

4. Max G. Abbott in Foreward to Harmon Zeigler and M. Kent Jennings, Governing American Schools (North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1974), p. x.

5. Frederick M. Wirt and Michael W. Kirst, The Political Web of American Schools, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1972), p. 7.

6. See Peter M. Blau and Richard Scott, Formal Organizations, (San Francisco: Chambers, 1962), p. 45.

7. Robert Salisbury, "Schools and Politics in the Big Cities," Harvard Educational Review, 37(Summer, 1967), p. 417.

8. National Center for Educational Statistics, Statistics of Public Elementary and Secondary Day Schools, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 14.

9. David Truman, The Governmental Process, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 265.

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11. Kenneth Prewitt, "Political Ambitions, Volunteerism, and Electoral Responsibility," American Political Science Review, 64(March, 1970), pp. 5-17.

12. See Robert O. Loveridge, City Manager in Legislative Politics, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1971), Chapter 4 & 5, and Alan L. Salstein, "City Managers and City Councils: Perceptions of Division of Authority," Western Political Quarterly, 27(June, 1974), pp. 275-287.

13. Lawrence C. Pierce, "Teachers' Organizations and Bargaining," in National Committee for Citizens in Education, Public Testimony on Public Schools, (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corp., 1975), p. 124.

14. National School Boards Association, Impact of Collective Bargaining on Curriculum-Instruction, (NSBA Report, 1975-2, Table 1).

15. Keyes vs. Denver School District, #1, 93, S. Ct. 2686.

16. See, for example, Harmon Zeigler, Harvey Tucker and L.A. Wilson, II, "Communication and Decision-Making in American Public Education: A Longitudinal and Comparative Study," in Jay Scribner, ed., National Society for the Study of Education Yearbook, (1977), and Harmon Zeigler, Harvey Tucker, and L.A. Wilson II, "Who Governs American Education: One More Time," in Don Davies, ed., Study of Schooling in the United States, (Los Angeles: Institute for Development of Educational Activities (I/D/E/A), forthcoming.

17. Heinz Eulau, Micro-Macro Political Analysis: Accents of Inquiry (Chicago: Aldine, 1965).

18. Eulau and Karps, op. cit., p. 17.

19. Verba and Nie, op. cit., pp. 302-304 and 412-414. Unlike the Verba and Nie study we assigned concurrence scores of 1.0 to respondents who named no most important problems.

20. See National School Boards Association, The People Look at Their School Boards, (NSBA Report, 1975-1), pp. 21-22, for further evidence of the public's failure to understand the responsibilities of school boards.

21. Eulau and Karps, op. cit., p. 18.

22. Eulau and Karps, op. cit., p. 21.

23. Eulau and Karps, op. cit., p. 24.

24. Eulau and Karps, op. cit., p. 25.